Unpacking the criteria

The following is intended to help you understand each criterion in terms of what should be included in the extended essay to achieve the highest level.

Each criterion is organized at three levels of information. Firstly, the **markband**, which relates to the mark range available; secondly, **the strand**, which relates to what is being assessed; and, thirdly, **the indicators**, which are the demonstration of the strands within a markband. For example:

Markband 1–2	**(Strand)** The topic is communicated unclearly and incompletely. (Indicators of the strand) • Identification and explanation of the topic is limited; the purpose and focus of the research is unclear, or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in the subject for which it is registered. **(Strand)** The research question is stated but not clearly expressed or too broad. (Indicators of the strand) • The research question is too broad in scope to be treated effectively within the word limit and requirements of the task, or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in the subject for which it is registered. • The intent of the research question is understood but has not been clearly expressed and/or the discussion of the essay is not focused on the research question. **(Strand)** Methodology of the research is limited. (Indicators of the strand) • The source(s) and/or method(s) to be used are limited in range given the topic and research question. • There is limited evidence that their selection was informed.
Criterion	Unpacking the criterion
A: Focus and method	This criterion focuses on the topic, the research question and the methodology. It assesses the explanation of the focus of the research (this includes the topic and the research question), how the research will be undertaken, and how the focus is maintained throughout the essay. 1. The topic chosen is identified and explained to readers in terms of contextualizing and justifying its worthiness. • How well does the research paper identify and communicate the chosen topic? 2. The purpose and focus of the research to be addressed is within the scope of a 4,000-word extended essay, is outlined in the introduction and specified as a research question.

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	• Is the research question appropriate given the scope of the task? For example, is the topic sufficiently focused to be adequately addressed within the requirements of the task? • Is the research question clearly stated, focused and based on/ situated against background knowledge and understanding of the chosen subject/topic area? • Is the focus of the research question maintained throughout the essay? 3. The research is planned and appropriate methods of data collection (methodology) are chosen and identified in order to address the research question. • Is there evidence of effective and informed source/method selection with regard to the choice of appropriate sources and/ or method(s) used to gather information, including narrowing of scope the range of sources/methods, in order to address the research question within the constraints of the word limit? 4. Sources/methods are considered relevant/appropriate or sufficient in so far as the academic standards for the discipline are concerned. For example, for an economics essay, it would not be sufficient to only use textbooks but rather include reports and data. There is no consideration of the research question as such.
B: Knowledge and understanding	This criterion assesses the extent to which the research relates to the subject area/discipline used to explore the research question, or in the case of the world studies extended essay, the issue addressed and the two disciplinary perspectives applied, and additionally the way in which this knowledge and understanding is demonstrated through the use of appropriate terminology and concepts. 1. The research question being investigated is put into the context of the subject/discipline/issue. • Demonstration of the appropriate and relevant selection and application of the sources is identified. 2. Knowledge and understanding of the topic chosen and the research question posed is demonstrated with appropriate subject-specific terminology. • The use of subject-specific terminology and/or concepts is an indicator of knowledge and understanding of the discipline(s)/ issue discussed. 3. Sources/methods are assessed here in terms of their appropriateness to the research question.
C: Critical thinking	This criterion assesses the extent to which critical thinking skills have been used to analyse and evaluate the research undertaken.

	1. The selection and application of the research presented is relevant and appropriate to the research question. 2. The appropriateness of sources/methods in terms of how they have been used in the development of the argument presented. 3. The analysis of the research is effective and focused on the research question. 4. The discussion of the research develops a clear and coherent reasoned argument in relation to the research question. 5. There is a critical evaluation of the arguments presented in the essay. 6. Unlikely or unexpected outcomes can also demonstrate critical thinking.
D: Presentation	This criterion assesses the extent to which the presentation follows the standard format expected for academic writing and the extent to which this aids effective communication. 1. **Structure:** the structure of the essay is compatible with the expected conventions of a research paper in the subject for which the essay has been submitted. (Examiners, supervisors and students are advised to check the guidance given in the *Extended essay guide* for the relevant subject.) 2. **Layout:** title page, table of contents, page numbers, section headings (where appropriate), effective inclusion of illustrative materials (tables, graphs, illustrations, appropriately labelled) and quotations, bibliography and referencing. • The referencing system should be correctly and consistently applied and should contain the minimum information as detailed in the Extended essay guide.* • The extended essay has not exceeded the maximum word limit.** * If referencing does not meet this minimum standard work should be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct. ** If the essay exceeds 4,000 words, examiners should not read or assess beyond the maximum 4,000-word limit. Students who exceed the word limit will compromise the assessment of their extended essay across all criteria. For example, in criterion B, any knowledge and understanding demonstrated beyond the 4,000-word limit will be treated as if it were not present; in criterion C, any analysis, discussion or evaluation made beyond the 4,000-word limit will be treated as if the point had not been made. Given the holistic nature of the assessment criteria, students who write in excess of the word limit will self-penalize across all criteria.
E: Engagement	This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, after considering the student's *Reflections on planning and progress form*.

	1. **Engagement with the process:** the student has engaged in discussions with their supervisor in the planning and progress of their research; the student is able to reflect on and refine the research process, and react to insights gained through the exploration of their research question; the student is able to evaluate decisions made throughout the research process and suggest improvements for their own working practices. 2. **Engagement with their research focus:** an insight into the student's thinking, intellectual initiative and creative approach through reflections on the thought and research process; the extent to which the student voice is present rather than that of the supervisor and academics; is the student's engagement reflected?